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SUBJECT: CONTE'S PARTY STILL IN THE PICTURE, "SATISFIED"
WITH THE MILITARY JUNTA

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Guinea's ruling party for the past 25 years, the PUP, is "satisfied" with the National Council for Democracy and Development (CNDD) and is willing to work with the military regime to organize legislative elections within the next six months. A PUP contact said that the party is willing to consider constitutional revisions, but that such revisions should not interfere with the electoral timeline. Describing the next few months as a honeymoon period, Contact seemed convinced that the CNDD will eventually fail, that opposition political parties overestimate their power and influence, and that the population will ultimately return to the PUP. Whether for show or because of personal conviction, he seemed confident that the PUP will continue to be a major political player in the months and years ahead. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Poloff met with Sekou Konate, the Secretary General of the late President Conte's Party for Unity and Progress (PUP), on January 12. The PUP's headquarters was relatively subdued, with the Guinean flag flying at half-mast in deference to the official 40-day mourning period, and a handful of people sitting outside in chairs under shade trees. The million dollar construction project that Konate had bragged about to Poloff during a visit exactly one year ago had been abandoned, only the footprint and random bars of rebar visible.

PUP AT EASE WITH THE CNDD

¶3. (U) When asked for the party's views on the military junta and the transition period, Konate told Poloff that the PUP has accepted the National Council for Democracy and Development (CNDD) and is willing to work with its members. He described how the CNDD demonstrated an appropriate level of respect and honor for the deceased head of state by ensuring that funeral arrangements went forward in a dignified and secure manner. "The CNDD has not spoken poorly of him (Conte) and that is important," he said. Konate emphasized that the PUP is content with the current situation.

WHY WE HAD A COUP

¶4. (SBU) Konate said that the military coup was not a surprise to most PUP members. He pulled out a document apparently drafted during a party congress in October and began to read the party's conclusions verbatim. He drew similarities between the pre-coup situation in 1996 to the later months of 2008, saying that the party had been deeply worried that continued weak governance, poor economic conditions, and political infighting would eventually encourage the military to attempt a coup. "This is exactly

what happened in 1996," he told Poloff.

15. (SBU) Looking up from his analysis, Konate said "but you know the real reason behind the coup, don't you? - it was all Sompore's fault." (COMMENT. A PUP member, Aboubacar Sompore was the head of the now dissolved National Assembly, and Conte's constitutional successor. END COMMENT). According to Konate, Sompore "incited the youths" to stage a coup because he handled the transfer of power poorly and did not demonstrate an appropriate level of respect to the deceased president. "Why did he have to step in just hours after Conte's death to announce that he was taking power? He did not have to do that because it was clearly stated in the constitution...his announcement was inappropriate," he said. Konate said that Sompore should have been focused on arranging the funeral and providing for the country's grief, not focusing on his own personal ambitions. "He did not demonstrate respect for African culture," Konate said.

TOWARDS ELECTIONS

16. (U) On the question of elections, Konate said that the PUP is committed to holding legislative elections within six months. Poloff noted that most of the other opposition parties had agreed to this agenda as well, but Konate said that the PUP had not been invited to the discussions.

17. (SBU) Konate noted that civil society leaders are pushing for constitutional reform and indicated that the PUP would not necessarily be against such reforms, as long as elections stay on track. He specifically mentioned a proposal to constitutionalize an age limit of 70 years for presidential candidates, which has some support, commenting "of course,

that would mean that Alpha Conde and Mamadou Bah would be out of the running" (COMMENT. Both are rival political leaders of opposition parties. END COMMENT). Konate added that it should be "easy" to make the necessary constitutional reforms and still hold elections within six months.

HIGH EXPECTATIONS

18. (SBU) According to Konate, it is important that the transition period not last more than a year. "If it takes longer, we are going to have real trouble," he said. He described how the current regime is in a honeymoon period with the population, and that people will soon begin to see that the CNDD cannot deliver on its promises. Konate said that the PM does not hold any real power and is in a difficult position. "He does not have the real authority to appoint his cabinet because he has to pacify all the military officers...he is under significant pressure," Konate said. "As soon as he announces the new government, everyone will see the reality," he added.

19. (SBU) When Poloff mentioned the French Minister of Cooperation's recent visit, Konate became visibly irritated. He described how the French had met with four of the major political parties, but intentionally failed to invite the PUP. "We are the only party that is nationally based and not tied to a single ethnicity," he said, adding "the French are inciting ethnic divisions by encouraging the ethnic parties."

PUP WILL CONTINUE TO BE A PLAYER

10. (SBU) Returning to elections, Konate seemed confident as he explained the other parties' lack of understanding of their popular support. He said that the opposition parties have overestimated their influence, but that the legislative elections will prove a valuable test, clearly demonstrating where each party stands. "The PUP is not dead and we will

continue to attract voters," he said. Konate pointed out that opposition leader Sidya Toure (leader of the UFR) had never actually participated in any previous election, implying that Sidya cannot have any real idea of his constituent base.

COMMENT

¶11. (SBU) A staunch PUP loyalist, Konate seemed convinced that the PUP will continue to be a major player in Guinean politics despite President Conte's death. His comments and attitude suggest that the PUP is simply sitting back and waiting for the situation to implode. Konate seemed convinced that the CNDD will be unable to effect meaningful change, that the population will become dissatisfied, and that the ethno-centrist positions of the political parties will ultimately bring people back to the PUP. He told Poloff several times "people will see." Konate said that the previous system of abuse and manipulation continues, a system for which he blames former government officials such as Prime Minister Kouyate, but certainly not President Conte. Konate's views may be wishful thinking and/or political posturing, but his underlying concerns are valid. END COMMENT.
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